

# The power of committed conversations: How great leaders turn talk into action

by Susan Leahy CSP and Freeman Michaels MA

What if simply adjusting your language, in a few simple ways, practiced over a fairly short period of time, could dramatically improve the results in your life?

“Talk is cheap.” As this truism suggests, our “talk” should be met with action. However, the saying is often distorted to suggest that we should only commit to those things that we are sure we can deliver on. This axiom may actually be more powerful in reverse: a lack of action is due to “cheap talk.” By “cheap talk” we, at [Group to TEAM Leadership Solutions](#), suggest that uncommitted language is the cause of inaction and/or ineffectiveness.

Language is habitual. And our patterns of speaking have a tremendous impact on our effectiveness. The majority of leaders have little to no awareness of this and often fail to recognize that their speech patterns, and the patterns of those on their team, are actually determining results.

Many of our habitual patterns, in language, cloud our meaning and subsequently inhibit our success. We have learned to speak in a way that distances us from commitment. This unconscious habit of avoiding commitment is costing us.

In this brief article we want to introduce the idea that “language of commitment” builds trust and generates results. From our perspective, commitment is a tool that upgrades conversations, leading to stronger bonds and more effective coordination of actions. Additionally, commitment opens up possibilities that previously didn’t exist.

Most people speak without a clear and deliberate intention. Clear intention can be expressed in language as committed speaking. Uncommitted speaking, on the other hand, is vague and ambiguous, leaving people unsure of what a leader is really saying.

Language can be used to describe or it can be used to create. For example, the sentence, “The job has been completed,” does not impact reality. It only represents or describes something that already occurred.

Commitment, on the other hand, can be used to create. Commitment is an action, in language, that brings something into existence that wasn’t there before.

Promising and requesting are commitments to participate in creating a future together. Requests draw out clear commitments and promises define those commitments in space and time (e.g. “I promise to have the report on your desk by 3 pm on Friday). When we make a request or promise to do something, the promise or the request do not describe reality in its present state. Promises and requests express an intent to have the future be different from the way that it currently is.

Mastering the power of commitment, as a generative function of language, allows us to literally create reality. Language, in this way, becomes a generative space where leaders can invent new possibilities that did not exist before.

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